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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Humanitarian and Human Rights situation in South Sudan

Civilians in South Sudan have been the main targets in the recent ethnic violence that likely killed more than 10,000 people since December 15, 2013. During the violence committed by the regular army as well as by rebel forces associated with former South Sudan Vice-President Riek Machar, thousands of South Sudanese and foreigners were raped or arbitrarily arrested, tortured or their belongings were looted and their houses were burnt. The Government of South Sudan insists that the unrest was sparked by a failed military coup in the capital of Juba. The ousted Vice President Machar and many observers have been denying the allegation of a coup.

While the trigger for the violence remains in dispute, the tremendous impact of the fighting which started in mid-December and the horrendous scale of mass human rights violations committed by all conflict parties have shocked the world. At least one million civilians have fled the violence, searching for protection in other states of South Sudan or in neighboring countries. Continual fighting has caused widespread hunger and a desperate need for international humanitarian relief.

The civilian population is harmed by a total lack of protection by the regular security forces which were involved in massive intimidation, arbitrary killings and massacres. In the mostly Christian South Sudan not even female church workers could count on protection. Scores of them were killed in January 2014 while seeking refuge from rebel attacks at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church compound in Bor, when rebels descended on them, raping several women before shooting the church workers at close range. Several churches were attacked and looted, pastors were harassed. Immediately after fighting broke out between Nuer and Dinka soldiers of the Presidential Guard in Juba on December 15, 2013, members of the Presidential Guard and other security forces targeted ethnic Nuer citizens in the South Sudan capital. More than 600 Nuer civilians and soldiers were killed, some 800 people were wounded in the violence. Official security forces launched house-to-houses searches in neighborhoods of Nuer citizens and arbitrarily arrested or murdered many Nuer between December 16 and 18. More than 30.000 Nuer searched for protection in the two UNMISS bases in Juba, thousands ethnic non-Dinka fled from the city to shelter in other regions of South Sudan or in neighboring countries.

But violence has spread to other cities in January and February 2014, despite a cessation of hostilities agreement signed on January 23, 2014. Scores of women have been raped in a wave of sexual violence committed by regular soldiers and rebels. A survivor of sexual violence has reported about the abduction of ten women in Juba who were gang-raped by soldiers in an empty hospital. Massacres were committed in Malakal, Bentiu, Bor and other cities of South Sudan. After the town of Bentiu was taken by rebels in mid-April 2014, hundreds of Dinka civilians and merchants from Darfur who sheltered for protection in mosques, churches and private houses were taken to the streets and deliberately murdered. A survivor reported that 48 merchants from Darfur who had searched for protection in a private house, were taken to the street by rebels, lined up and then gunned down. Hate messages were broadcast in local radio stations urging the population to rape and murder Dinka or Nuer who were not enthusiastic about the victory of the rebel forces.
State security forces and armed rebels blamed each other numerous times for ceasefire violations and massive human rights violations. But no conflict party has accepted responsibility for the crimes against humanity which have been committed since December 2013.

The recent upsurge in massive human rights violations didn't come unexpected. The human rights situation in South Sudan has been deteriorating steadily since the new state has been established in July 2011. Society for Threatened Peoples has warned for several years that South Sudan authorities have deliberately been violating the right to press freedom. South Sudan journalists continuously were intimidated, arbitrarily arrested or became victims of armed attacks of unknown assailants. Media rights have been eroding in 2014, South Sudan journalists are complaining. Since the fighting started in December 2013 the entire print of the daily "Juba Monitor" was confiscated by officials four times. Frequently, journalists have been questioned by security officials. The South Sudan Government denied having harassed media staff. In March 2014, presidential spokesman Ateny Wek Ateny declared National Security officials had not brought in any journalists for questioning but had offered them "advice because some journalists are very irresponsible and they write very irresponsibly."

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of South Sudan to:

- Respect the cessation of hostilities agreements;
- End Impunity and to put all those on trial who were responsible for massive human rights violations since the violence started in December 2013;
- Guarantee and respect the freedom of press;
- Ensure the protection of civilian population in conflict areas;
- Stop corruption and to enhance good governance.